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ABSTRACT

Noting that the encouragement of employee commitment to the organization is a top-priority item across much of corporate America, this paper focuses on numerous rhetorical employee identification strategies utilized by USAir, one of America's largest airlines. After a brief synopsis of the history of USAir, the paper first reports on an examination of the company's employee newsletter between December 1986 and January 1992 to collect data. The paper then analyzes the rhetoric used in the newspaper to encourage employee identification, in particular, and by implication, their commitment. The paper pinpoints the rhetorical strategies of (1) antithesis, (2) the family metaphor, (3) the transcendental "we," and (4) common ground--all found in the writing printed in the employee newspaper--and discusses these strategies in detail. The paper concludes that the study is a rich source of material for teaching and instruction in many aspects of communication (including business and professional speaking and organization communication), and also that the research is germane for any course dealing with communication theory and rhetorical analysis. A repeated theme of the paper is that identification with targets, such as workplace organizations, is natural and highly functional for both employees and their companies. (NKA)

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ENCOURAGING SHARED IDENTITY:

USAIR'S MESSAGE TO EMPLOYEES

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Abstract

The encouragement of employee commitment to the organization is a top-priority item across much of corporate America. Employee identification with the company is a dimension of commitment particularly sought by top management. It is a relational state that is potentially advantageous for both individuals and their organizations. Identification, or sharing of interests, with external targets, such as the workplace, helps us develop a sense of self, self-worth, and belonging. It helps us to reach decisions and make sense of our experiences. From the perspective of the organization, employee identification is important, often essential, to optimal and predictable functioning of the company. Those who identify with their company tend to be positively motivated. They share the company's goals and values and make work-related decisions based on what they perceive to be the company's best interest.

In few industries is the encouragement of employee identification and commitment more important or more challenging than in that of commercial aviation. In few industries is change greater, more pronounced, or more rapid. As a result, large numbers of workers face continual uncertainty and insecurity about their jobs and their airlines.

This exploratory report describes numerous rhetorical employee identification strategies utilized by USAir, America's fifth-largest airline. The primary sources of data were most issues of the Company's employee

newspaper, USAir News, published from December, 1986, through January, 1992.

Antithesis was found to be one of the identification strategies used by USAir. This strategy implicitly encourages association with the company by explicitly encouraging dissociation with perceived external threats. USAir's appeals to antithesis are usually context specific and are prompted by specific actions taken against the Company by these external sources. One external source is viewed as a major threat, in general, across time and situations. This source is the "industry giants," a label encompassing American, United and Delta Airlines.

The family metaphor is another rhetorical appeal to identification used rather frequently by USAir. Application of this metaphor to an organization can suggest ideas often associated with the notion of family, such as unity, loyalty, and identification. USAir appears to employ the family metaphor most frequently in communication associated with the PSA and Piedmont mergers and references to relationships within Organizational subunits.

The rhetorical strategy used most extensively by USAir to appeal to employee identification is common ground. Common ground appeals can include many kinds of specific communication tactics, all of which directly assert or encourage association between employees and their company. The tactics are designed to highlight and advocate shared values, ideas, and goals. The values, attitudes, and goals that emerge in USAir management's use of common ground appeals to employee identification provide an excellent profile

of the Company's perception of its "new USAir" corporate image. It is an image having as its cornerstones uncompromising concern with safety; excellence in work ethic, operating standards, and customer service; teamwork across the Organization; and employee pride in, and personification of, the "new USAir."

This study has been a rich source of material for instruction in many aspects of communication. It has provided numerous ideas and extensive data for courses such as public speaking, business and professional speaking, and organizational communication which devote considerable attention to analysis of, and persuasive appeals to, target audiences. Information gleaned from this investigation has also proved to be highly valuable in teaching evaluation of language and statistics in a critical thinking course. Finally, it should be noted that research of this nature is highly germane and real-world relevant to any course dealing with communication theory or rhetorical analysis.

Introduction

The encouragement of employee commitment to the work organization is a top-priority item across much of corporate America. Top management vigorously pursues its various dimensions: organizational identification, involvement, and loyalty. This kind of commitment, or psychological attachment, serves numerous purposes for both individuals and their organizations.

For individuals, commitment, particularly along the identification dimension, provides a sense of self, of belonging, of personal worth and status (Cheney, 1983a; Romzek, 1990). Commitment to the work organization can afford the opportunity to advance personal values and help fulfill the human need for meaningful work (Romzek, 1990). Identification with external targets, such as work organizations, helps us make sense of our experiences, organize our thoughts, and make decisions (Cheney, 1983a).

It cannot and should not be assumed that all workers are committed to, or are even inclined toward, workplace commitment. The decline of employee commitment is a theme often addressed in business, academic, and popular literature. Nevertheless, strong rationale exists in support of the argument that inclination toward commitment and identification is the rule rather than the exception (Burke, 1962; Cheney, 1983a, 1983b). As organizational communication researcher George Cheney (1983b) has written, "In America it is natural for a person to identify himself or herself with the business corporation she or he serves" (p. 158). For this large body of workers who desire, or are

open to, organizational identification, involvement, and/or loyalty, ample opportunity exists for management to cultivate these dispositions and their related behaviors.

Organizations of all kinds, shapes, and sizes take advantage of this opportunity because employee commitment is important, often essential, to the predictable and optimal functioning of the organization. Committed employees are less likely to leave the organization (Romzek, 1990). They tend to be strongly motivated and to perform above and beyond the call of duty in order to accomplish goals shared with the organization (Romzek, 1990). They care what happens to the organization because they do share its goals and values (Romzek, 1990). They tend to advance a positive image of the organization, to represent, even personify, it. Perhaps most importantly from the perspective of top management, those employees who are committed to the organization, who identify with it, have a strong tendency to make job-related decisions that are perceived to be in its best interest (Bullis & Tompkins, 1989; Cheney, 1983a, 1983b; Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Romzek, 1990; Shockley-Zalabak, 1988; Simon, 1976; Tompkins & Cheney, 1983a, 1983b).

The strength of employee commitment is directly related to the level of organizational involvement, loyalty, and identification (Barge & Schlucter, 1988). The more employees are attached to their work roles, the more they are said to be involved in their organizations (Barge & Schlucter, 1988). Loyalty refers to the warmth and affection felt for the organization, as well as willingness to remain a part of it (Barge & Schlucter, 1988). Those who

identify with their work organizations internalize and advocate company goals, values, and ideas. They develop a sense of commonality with fellow workers. The organization becomes as much a part of them as they are a part of the organization (Bullis & Tompkins, 1989). For better or worse, the employees take the organization, and the organization takes the employees.

Management's rhetorical strategies to encourage employee identification can be viewed as ranging along an association-dissociation continuum (Cheney, 1983b; Mullins, 1989; Olson, 1980). Complete association with the organization regarding work-related matters lies at one extreme (Cheney, 1983b; Mullins, 1989; Olson, 1980). Total dissociation with outsiders, especially those posing real or perceived threats to the organization, lies at the other extreme (Cheney, 1983b; Mullins, 1989; Olson, 1980). The strategies used are identifiable but often overlapping; and, since association assumes dissociation, the extremes of the continuum are not mutually exclusive.

While employee commitment should be of major concern across the breadth of corporate America, no industry warrants greater attention to the matter than does commercial aviation. In few industries is the old adage--"The only thing constant is change itself"--more applicable. For more reasons than one, the term "turbulent" is probably a more fitting descriptor than change. Birth and death of carriers, expansion and downsizing, mergers and acquisitions, and sensitivity to economic mood swings have traditionally characterized the operating environment for the nation's passenger airlines. In recent years these characteristics have been far more pronounced than ever before and their

occurrence greatly accelerated. In addition, growth and capital expenditure reduction; organizational restructuring; bankruptcies and complete failures; disappointing profit-to-debt ratios; financial community skepticism; fear of wayward monopolies; wage and benefit freezes and concessions; hiring freezes; and extensive employee transfers, furloughs, and layoffs have become stark realities across the industry. Such an environment can be fertile ground for the insecurity and uncertainty that can prove devastating for employee commitment. At the same time, it provides a ready-made and challenging atmosphere for its cultivation.

This report examines selected aspects of employee commitment initiatives undertaken from December, 1986, through January, 1992, by USAir, America's sixth-largest passenger airline. The analysis is of a descriptive exploratory nature. The primary source of data was USAir News, the Company's biweekly employee newspaper. This kind of house organ is widely viewed as a major mode for fostering and facilitating employee commitment, in general, and identification, in particular (Company Publications, 1980; Cheney, 1983b; Jablin, 1987). The content of all available issues of USAir News from December 12, 1986, through January 20, 1992, was examined. The Company no longer maintains copies of three issues. The rhetoric used to encourage employee identification, in particular, and, by implication, commitment, is analyzed. The discussion addresses such issues as the rhetorical identification strategies used by USAir over time and those used in conjunction with specific events and circumstances.

Background

Before turning to this discussion, a brief synopsis of the history of USAir is in order. USAir originated as All-American Aviation in the spring of 1939. All-American was the brain child primarily of Richard C. Dupont. It was a unique service, providing airmail drop and pickup to small, geographically isolated communities in the Allegheny Mountain regions of western Pennsylvania, eastern Ohio, and West Virginia. The terrain of the area was rugged and challenging, and the weather was often less than conducive to smooth flying. Nevertheless, All-American persevered, surviving not only nature's obstacles, but uncertain financial conditions and a frequently unfavorable Washington political climate, as well.

By 1949 political and economic conditions dictated that All-American become a passenger carrier and abandon its adventurous, much-romanticized airmail service. Under the banner first of All-American Airways and, then, beginning in 1953, Allegheny Airlines, the short-haul feeder airline gradually and steadily grew and expanded. Through the 1950's, '60's, and early '70's, Allegheny's passenger traffic and markets increased, its commuter system developed, and its fleet became jet-age aircraft. In 1968 Allegheny acquired Lake Central Airlines; and, four years later, New York-based Mohawk Airlines became part of the growing Allegheny air system. In 1975 the Allegheny success story turned sour briefly when skyrocketing fuel prices and national economic woes plunged the Company into a financial crisis. The results were temporary passenger capacity reduction and employee furloughs.

In the midst of the 1975 crisis, Edwin I. Colodny became President of Allegheny. The Company soon returned to its accustomed status of growth and profitability. The passage of the Airline Deregulation Act in 1978 drastically altered the nature and course of commercial aviation. Unexpectedly, Allegheny's post-deregulation passenger traffic grew in an unprecedented manner. In October, 1979, the Company name was changed to USAir, a reflection of the airline's size and national scope of service. Though USAir steadily expanded its national presence through the early and mid-1980's, it continued to emphasize its hub-spoke system and concentrate its strength in the northeastern United States.

President Colodny recognized that USAir's respected reputation and financial strength made it a tempting target for would-be corporate raiders and other airlines seeking to expand. He also knew that, if USAir was to continue its growth nationally and internationally, it would have to become an active player in the merger/acquisition arena. USAir approached California-based Pacific Southwest Airlines (PSA) and found it receptive to a merger offer. Plans to acquire Pacific Southwest were announced in December, 1986. Two months after the PSA announcement, USAir revealed plans to acquire Piedmont Aviation. Like USAir, Piedmont had been a highly successful survivor of deregulation; but it felt that industry conditions were such that merger with USAir would best serve its interests. The PSA merger was consummated on April 8, 1988; and on August 5, 1989, Piedmont Airlines was merged into USAir.

From the combined USAir, PSA, and Piedmont, what the Company refers to as the "new USAir" emerged. The years since the December, 1986, PSA acquisition announcement have been marked by rapid-fire internal and external developments unprecedented in Company history. The mergers enhanced USAir's national and international presence as never before. They extensively increased fleet size and commuter airline affiliations. They resulted in a more than doubling of USAir's workforce. At one point soon after the Piedmont merger, the workforce exceeded 50,000. A new, high-profile corporate image campaign has been implemented. More than ever before, USAir has become an aggressively competitive marketer and advertiser.

However, by no means has all been smooth flying for the "new USAir." Since late 1989, the Company, long considered a premier Organization in such areas as prudent management, consistent profitability and strength, and positive management-employee relations, has experienced the most difficult period in its history. The PSA and Piedmont acquisitions were not trouble free. They brought with them heavy merger-related expenses and resulting debt. Resolution of labor issues associated with workforce integration proved to be time consuming and frustrating. Perhaps most time consuming and frustrating of all was the integrating of three organizational cultures. Cultural integration is seldom easy; but, when all of the cultures are characterized by a deep sense of pride and identity, the process can be especially painful.

With the passage of time and investment of much effort, merger-related problems have been, or are being, resolved. Far more difficult to resolve,

however, are problems arising from fierce competition in the airline industry and those emanating from unfavorable political and economic conditions in the external environment. In recent years, airlines have engaged in a series of financially devastating fare wars. They have been embroiled in intense, costly competition for national and international routes and markets. They have watched the investment community grow increasingly wary with the demise and predicted demise of victims of the struggle for survival in the industry. The recessionary state of the domestic and world economy in the past few years has had a sharp adverse effect on passenger traffic. For many months fear of terrorism generated by the Persian Gulf crisis compounded the depressed traffic problems. The same crisis precipitated a sudden, crippling climb in fuel prices. Lack of stability and predictability regarding fuel costs still persists.

The upshot of the combination of all of these factors is that, since 1989, USAir and most other air carriers have incurred severe financial losses. Like others, USAir has found it necessary to downsize, restructure, and reallocate in a number of areas. Nonstrategic capital expenditures have been slashed. Passenger capacity has been reduced. Service in money-losing markets has been reduced or eliminated. Strict fuel efficiency and passenger capacity controls have been implemented in aircraft acquisition, assignment, and reassignment. However, among all steps taken, those probably most potentially destructive to employee commitment have been the transfers, furloughs, layoffs, and wage and benefit reductions that have affected several thousand USAir workers. Management has taken numerous actions aimed at

cushioning the impact on employees and their families and has assured them that jobs and wage and benefits concessions will be restored when the Company returns to profitability. However, it is difficult to determine the effect of such efforts on morale.

Within the context of a longstanding tradition of success and a recent period of significant setbacks, Edwin I. Colodny, Seth E. Schofield (who succeeded Colodny when he retired as President and CEO in June, 1991), and other senior officers have addressed the issue of encouraging and sustaining employee commitment. Their rhetorical approaches, as manifested in USAir News, have been numerous and diverse. The techniques, particularly those aimed at fostering identification, frequently overlap and appear in combination. They highlight areas of employee-organizational bonding that do exist, or are asserted to exist already; and, both directly and indirectly, they advocate the strengthening of these ties. Some of the strategies vary in kind or emphasis depending on the fortunes of the Organization. Some recur regularly throughout the more than five years of USAir News issues surveyed. The rhetoric frequently focuses on the co-mingling of employee-subunit, employee-organizational, and subunit-organizational bonding. Regardless of the rhetorical strategies used or the Organizational or external environment surrounding them, it is evident that USAir management views employee identification and overall commitment as essential and designs its appeals to that end accordingly.

Rhetorical Identification Strategies

Antithesis

One rhetorical strategy used to promote association, i.e., identification with an organization, is to encourage dissociation with outsiders perceived by management as threats or enemies. The strategy, deemed antithesis, rhetorically encourages members to unite against common foes. Many corporations tend to perceive organized labor as an adversary. In the case of USAir, negative rhetorical reference to unions is present, but it is neither extensive nor scathing. Probably somewhat responsible for this posture is the fact that USAir News is intended for all employees, a significant percentage of whom are union members. In addition, the Company has a history of healthy management-labor relations. Even when merger-related issues created considerable strain, negative rhetoric seldom appeared. Officials, such as President Colodny, would say little more than that they were "concerned" about the problems. Notable exceptions to the limited criticism of unions are the rhetorical references to the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT). These references, though limited, are clearly negative. Officials are quoted as telling groups such as stockholders that they were "pleased" when fleet service workers rejected Teamster representation in 1989 and viewed it as a "positive step." USAir News made it a point to let readers know that the Teamsters no longer represented any USAir workers.

A far stronger appeal to antithesis appears in content referring to three other external sources. In September, 1987, a Department of Transportation

administrative law judge recommended against the USAir-Piedmont merger. USAir viewed the merger as essential. Articles in several issues of USAir News following the recommendation leave little doubt about the role in which management wished employees to cast the judge. President and CEO Colodny is quoted as stating that USAir Group (the holding Company for USAir) finds the recommendation "incomprehensible" and that failure to approve the merger would be a "travesty" and an "outrage." The USAir-Piedmont Brief urging Department of Transportation rejection of the recommendation is quoted as calling it

". . . a virtual catalog of erroneous factual statements and precedent-breaking legal conclusions." It was deemed ". . . insupportable as a matter of law and grossly unjust to USAir and Piedmont which deserved the same treatment accorded their larger competitors . . . ." The USAir News summary of the Brief also refers to the judge's recommendation as a "mathematical exercise." It should be noted that the Department of Transportation did reject the recommendation and approved the merger on October 30, 1987. The casting of this judiciary official in such a highly adversarial role is obviously context specific. A context-specific evaluation always determines USAir's view of government officials and bodies as friends or foes.

The media, too, have been cast in the role of unmistakable adversary in context-specific situations. Not unexpectedly it has occurred in response to negative press portrayals of USAir. USAir News reports numerous instances of top-management rebuttals of news media accusations of unfair pricing and

possible monopolistic actions by USAir. In all articles the appeal to dissociate with the accusers is evident. The most overt appeal to antithesis regarding the news media, however, emerges in reactions to coverage of USAir accidents and cost-cutting measures. USAir News extensively quotes and paraphrases the remarks of numerous Company officials in various departments. While, in all instances, blanket indictment of the media is rejected, the condemnation of specific offenders and specific kinds of offenders is potent. Employees are warned to be on guard against reports evidencing unsubstantiated speculations, misrepresentation and ignoring of facts, sensationalism, lack of knowledge of the airline industry, negligent or irresponsible journalism, the necessity of meeting deadlines, and reasoning impaired by the stress of covering plane crashes.

A third major foe targeted in rhetorical efforts to encourage employee identification through antithesis is the competition in the airline industry. In some instances specific competitors are cited. America West is accused of "blackmail" in association with its offer to withdraw opposition to the Piedmont merger in exchange for takeoff and landing slots at LaGuardia and Washington National airports. The May 20, 1988, USAir News contains a reprint of a letter that had appeared in the March 14 issue of Cleveland Business. The letter cited aggressive marketing strategies aimed at USAir by archrival Continental Airlines and detailed the highly embarrassing backfiring of the strategies for Continental. However, in the more than five years of USAir News issues surveyed, the individual competitor viewed as the greatest threat in a given situation was

TWA, headed by financier Carl Icahn. The incident was the March, 1987, attempted hostile takeover of USAir by TWA. Obviously, the hastily arranged, short-lived takeover bid was vehemently opposed by USAir. Icahn and TWA are accused of being would-be corporate raiders, of flaunting the law, and of ". . . making a mockery of the regulatory process . . . ."

Thus far, the discussion of rhetorical encouragement of unity against competitors has focused on specific significant occurrences. The long-running USAir News feature, "Eye on the Competition," implicitly appeals to antithesis by comparing USAir to competitors in terms of quantity of service to various markets. More explicit appeals to identification through antithesis are inherent in regularly featured on-time performance, lost and damaged luggage, and consumer complaints comparisons between USAir and other airlines. The message clearly conveyed to employees in comparisons of these performance barometers is, "unite and work as a team to defeat the competition."

Neither American, United, nor Delta was cited in the discussion of encouragement of dissociation with other specific airlines. On occasion each of the three is identified individually as a USAir enemy. Far more extensive, however, are assertions of the threat posed by these carriers labeled in combination and in many circles as the "industry giants." USAir News content is replete with proclamation of this threat. The dangers emanating from domination of the industry by the "giants" are articulated by many USAir officials, in many contexts, and in association with many issues. They are repeatedly stressed as basic rationale for the PSA and Piedmont mergers.

Management appeals to employees to make the mergers successful frequently assert that unity is crucial if USAir is to survive against the "industry giants." Remaining a viable competitor against the big three "industry giants" is the basis used to solicit employee support for the proposed USAir/British Airways alliance, hiring outside consultants, implementing new internal programs, purchasing equipment and facilities, and selectively expanding service while, at the same time, imposing wage and benefit reductions. The obvious suggestion of the David and Goliath motif makes the rhetorical appeal of the "industry giants" threat especially powerful: Unite against the "giant(s)," and David, that is USAir, will prevail.

Family Metaphor

One of the most widely used appeals to identification and commitment is the application of the family metaphor to the organizational setting. The rhetorical power of the term "family" lies in the traits associated with it, such as identification, involvement, and loyalty. The family metaphor is not a pervasive feature of USAir managerial rhetoric, but it is by no means nonexistent. It is a frequent feature of messages pertaining to the PSA and Piedmont mergers. USAir News headlines, photo captions, article titles, and statements within articles in 1987, '88, and '89 often refer to welcoming PSA and Piedmont employees to the "USAir Group family." The January 16, 1989, issue of USAir News reprints remarks from the newly released book, The Service Edge. The co-authors, Ron Zemke and Dick Schaaf, cited benefits for

the traveler resulting from the "marriage" of the customer service-centered Piedmont and the operating standards-focused USAir. Piedmont President, Tom Schick, is quoted in USAir News as telling the June, 1989, meeting of the USAir Management Club, "We have in our possession today all the things required to make this marriage work." Media reports following the August 5, 1989, Piedmont merger are quoted as referring to a "quiet marriage" after "a two-and-a-half-year courtship." In recent years the family metaphor has appeared extensively in employee testimonials to be discussed later.

Common Ground and the Transcendental "We"

The rhetorical strategy, antithesis, implicitly encourages association, or identification, with an organization by explicitly encouraging dissociation with threatening external forces. Use of the family metaphor is aimed at promoting employee identification, involvement, and loyalty by implying that values and ties associated with the literal meaning of family should be projected into the workplace. As the preceding discussion indicates, USAir News evidences significant use of both strategies during the period studied. However, the rhetorical strategy that USAir appears to utilize most heavily in efforts to encourage employee identification and commitment is common ground. Common ground directly asserts and/or advocates the joining of employee and organization interests. Management uses many rhetorical tactics to convey the notion that there is and should be extensive job-related attitudinal similarity between employees and the company. Shared values, ideas, goals, and concerns are highlighted and espoused. Experiences and background shared by

workers and the organization are emphasized. Employees are encouraged to see themselves in terms of the organization, take pride in it, represent it, and personify it. They are encouraged to view the company's achievements and problems as their own and to make decisions based on perceived positive consequences for it.

The rhetorical strategy labeled the transcendental "we" is often used by USAir in addition to and in combination with common ground. This strategy is a primary example of the potential persuasive power of rhetoric. It consists of messages that assume the bonding of employee and organization values, goals, concerns, etc. Terms such as "we," "our," "us," and their surrogate forms are used in a manner that implies that the organization's perspective on an issue represents the view of all employees. Repeated exposure to messages of this kind can instill a sense of commonality of purpose and identity with the employing organization.

Throughout the mergers, financial problems, corrective measures, and new corporate image campaign that have characterized USAir in the past six years, direct assertion, assumption, and advocacy of employee-organization bonding has been the cornerstone of the Company's rhetorical identification and commitment efforts. Common ground tactics are used extensively across USAir News content. Material written by the editor and contributing writers, excerpts from Company officials' speeches to various internal and external audiences, Organization-wide employee letters from President Schofield and his predecessor, CEO Colodny, editorials in USAir magazine, interviews with

managers at all levels, and the text of other assorted items regularly highlight and espouse the bonding. The many articles on individual employees and departments and letters from customers are particularly rich in the assertion and encouragement of shared values and goals. Regardless of the common ground tactics used or the context in which they appear, the framework that emerges is the embodiment of management's desired perception of the "new USAir."

Some of the topics depicted as shared values and concerns are not directly job related. Among these are natural resources and the environment, animal life, patriotism, America, and support for the community. Material written by the CEO's and other senior officials clearly assert the importance of water resources such as the Chesapeake Bay, as well as the urgent need for controls of hazardous waste and aircraft noise. Numerous items, including several commendations from outside sources, convey to employees management's deep concern for the care and protection of animals. Company commitment to the flag and America is communicated in items discussing USAir promotions and praising employee efforts in association with the Persian Gulf crisis. Assertion of shared employee-Organization affinity for the heritage of Americana is an important element in the "USAir Begins with You" corporate image ad campaign introduced in May of 1991.

USAir News regularly features articles promoting cities and towns where the Company is introducing or expanding service, or it is building or renovating facilities. Of course, such promotion provides rationale for the initiatives being undertaken, but it also directly and indirectly communicates to employees the

notion that USAir places high value on the support of local communities. Articles detailing voluntary Company and employee involvement in relief and clean-up efforts following Hurricane Hugo in 1989 suggest special awareness of this commitment in times of crisis.

Perhaps, the external issue most frequently and overtly emphasized as a shared employee-Company concern is recycling, in particular, the recycling of aluminum cans. USAir News has devoted considerable space to explaining and promoting the can-recycling program since its inception in August, 1990. Consistently reiterated are the notions that employees should be credited with inspiring the program and that it was implemented because management shares, and is responding to, their enthusiasm.

USAir management often asserts that it, like the workforce, is concerned about such work-related issues as job security, job equity, fair pay and benefits, employee-management communication and relations, and health and safety matters. Such phrases as, "I'm sure you're wondering . . . .," "I deeply regret . . . .," and "We share your concerns about . . . .," recur often in officials' discussions of the uncertainties and disruptions in lives associated with the mergers and cost-cutting measures. "We understand and share your hurt and resentment" is clearly the message conveyed to employees in USAir News following several instances of media dramatization of USAir misfortunes.

As noted earlier, the integration of the USAir, Piedmont, and PSA organizational cultures was problematic. A "we-they" mindset, akin to antithesis, is a natural human tendency. It is an important factor in defining the

self both on and off the job. Achieving an Organization-wide redefinition of "we" as encompassing all three airlines was a very formidable task. One of management's foremost rhetorical approaches to this task was a common ground appeal to shared values. "We understand and share your nostalgia and your pride in your Company and what it has achieved" is the sentiment management continually communicates to employees of all three airlines throughout the integration process. Affectionate chronologies of the history of each airline, high praise for founders, articles on industry firsts and achievements for each company, and discussion of the growth and strengths of each consistently reinforce the message: We understand and identify with your sentiments.

Two potentially highly effective common ground tactics are the recognition of contributions to the organization by individual employees and the assurance that workers are valued as integral components of the company. These kinds of messages abound in USAir management communication to, and about, employees. Recipients of Customer Service, Management Achievement, and Speakers Bureau awards are recognized and almost always pictured in USAir News. Most issues contain stories that spotlight and compliment individual employees for their effort on behalf of the Company. Regardless of department or work-group affiliation, the importance of the employee's contributions to the future of the entire Organization is stressed. Regardless of audience, intent, or channel of communication, "dedicated" and/or "committed professionals" is a most frequently used descriptor of employees by USAir

management. Rarely do top officials receive honors or identify Company strengths and assets that they do not commend the workforce and stress its vital role. To questions about chances for USAir's chances for survival, senior officers repeatedly reply that they are sure USAir will survive and be a winner because of the "will," "character," and "dedication" of the employees.

Management across organizations does not limit common ground identification tactics to messages of the we-are-similar-to-you and we-recognize-and-appreciate-you varieties. It extensively and overtly advocates employee-organization bonding and assumes its existence. From these messages can be gleaned the corporate image, character, and values that management wants employees to internalize and personify. Such is the case with USAir. The common ground rhetoric of management-authored messages and those selected from employees and external sources distinctly profile the desired "new USAir" image.

Like most American corporations, USAir embraces such values as community involvement, giving and sharing, personal well-being, and professional and educational development. Individual and group participation in community activities is regularly encouraged and commended. Volunteer efforts of employees during the Christmas season and work with children and the disabled receive special recognition. While participation in charitable causes of many kinds is applauded, contributions and involvement in fundraising activities of the United Way are particularly urged and supported.

Several articles warn of the personal and workplace tragedies likely to result from substance abuse and urge those with problems in this area to seek help from the Company's Employee Assistance Program. The purchase of U.S. savings bonds is proposed to employees as the typical "buying a stake in America" promotion. USAir management obviously cónsiders education a high-priority value. Employees are frequently encouraged to pursue scholarship and other educational opportunities sponsored or facilitated by the Company for them and their families. Management's position is explicitly expressed in statements such as that referring to the Continuing Education Assistance Plan in the August 6, 1990, issue of USAir News: "We encourage employees to take advantage of the enhanced opportunities made available by this Plan. The Company feels strongly that an investment in the Continuing Education Assistance Plan is an investment in our future together."

We feel pride in our work organization if we take pleasure in our association with it and find its achievements especially satisfying or elating. Pride is one indicator of identification and is a trait strongly encouraged by most organizations. USAir's active assertion and promotion of Company pride appears in many contexts. They are at times overt and at times subtle. They are apparent in management-authored communication and in praise submitted by numerous external sources. Most notably they are extensive and intensive.

The David and Goliath motif cited earlier is a powerful rhetorical appeal to pride. Being proud of, and identifying with, the underdog that has the will and courage to continue to compete, survive, and succeed against "giants" is as

American as apple pie. Even in the midst of the present economic woes, "We will survive," "We will be a winner," "We are not a candidate for bankruptcy," "We will return to profitability," and "We are not going out of business" are the declarations vehemently stressed to employees.

A sense of Company pride is subtly suggested in reports of growth, expansion, and achievement such as being named official airline for Universal Studios. USAir News frequently asserts that all should take much pride in USAir's climb to a position among industry leaders in on-time performance, baggage handling, and passenger satisfaction in the past two years. Citing awards and honors received by Company officials, such as Edwin I. Colodny, is also a subtle means of promoting pride, especially when much of the credit for such recognition is attributed to fellow employees. "We can be proud of our Company" is certainly the message inherent in descriptions of accolades paid to USAir's mirror-image and other training programs by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). In June of 1988 USAir News reprinted a Washington Post article that was a rich source of encouragement of Company pride. The Post article had compared USAir's financial strategies for success as a deregulation survivor to those of Texas Air. In all categories compared--managerial philosophy, sound financial practices, and choice of merger partners --USAir was the obvious winner.

Most issues of USAir News reviewed contain several letters or excerpts from letters received from passengers. One of the purposes for highlighting the many compliments expressed in these letters for individual employees and

USAir as a whole is to promote Company pride. The following remarks are typical of the commendations: "It's a joy to fly USAir." "USAir is an excellent Airline." "USAir will be my preferred carrier." "Your first-class service is second to none." "If you're not now the number-one Airline, you soon will be." Many letters commend USAir's greatly improved operation and its quality of service in the past few years. Many writers state that they will recommend USAir to friends and relatives. A few go so far as to label themselves, figuratively speaking, USAir public relations agents.

In addition to encouraging a sense of pride, the passenger commendations published in USAir News profile a distinct set of work-related values, attitudes, goals, and behavior advocated by Company management. These dispositions and practices can also be discerned from published criticisms. They are indicated in testimony from employees, features on individuals and work units, and management-issued directives and guidelines.

It can be assumed that maintaining absolute, uncompromising commitment to safety is foremost among goals insisted upon by management. Nevertheless, the message is repeated continuously. Sharing in the pursuit of consistent number-one ranking in all areas of operational performance and quality service is also heavily promoted. Meeting and exceeding safety, performance, and quality service standards emerge, not merely as goals advocated by management, but as mandates fundamental to the desired corporate image of the "new USAir" and its value system.

Within this framework the internalization of many additional values, goals, ideas, and behaviors is advocated. Among them are loyalty, dedication, and demonstration of USAir pride. Many of the published letters from passengers commend employees who put Company interests ahead of their own. Frequently appearing, too, are commendations for employees who praised USAir and expressed their excitement about the new Corporate image. Ethical behavior is often cited and, of course, espoused. "Know your job thoroughly, do it well 100% of the time, and enjoy what you do" are pervasive themes in USAir managerial rhetoric. Countless examples of optimal skill development and utilization are cited, and workers across the Organization are quoted as stating that they really like their jobs and are happy to come to work each day. Since the financial picture began to deteriorate in early 1990, there has been a corresponding increase in the urging of shared money and materials conservation measures.

USAir places high value on small gestures in the above-and-beyond-the-call-of-duty category. Commendations for the sales agent who lent a customer money from her own pocket for a ticket, the customer service agent who drove 14 miles out of his way to take a stranded customer home, the mechanic who was especially helpful to a motorist with car trouble, and the personnel who provided extra tender loving care to a German shepherd being flown home on USAir following heart surgery are but a few examples indicative of management's recognition of those who go that extra mile.

All of the values and their related attitudes and behaviors discussed thus far are salient features of USAir's common ground rhetorical appeals to employee identification. However, four areas appear to be of paramount importance in the "new" corporate image. These areas include customer service, relationships with co-workers, Organization-wide interdependence and unity, and personification of USAir.

The need to be customer oriented is a given in any service industry. The early USAir News issues surveyed evidence advocacy of quality customer service, but the appeal is conventional and the language typically abstract. The material is characterized by such statements as, "We need to renew our commitment to customer service," and "We need to be customer oriented."

During the second half of 1989 it became painfully apparent that merger-related problems were taking a significant toll on quality customer service. At the same time it was recognized that quality customer service would be a major determinant of airline survival in the 1990's. As a result, management quickly began to promote customer service excellence, not simply as important, but as imperative. Major projects, such as the "Putting People First" training program, have been initiated. Customer Service awards have been established for employees who excel in this area, and the "Designated Officer" program has been implemented to improve communication between top management and employees and top management and the communities served by USAir, as well.

Since 1989 communication urging Organization-wide sharing of the total quality management approach to business has been abundant. Employees are

urged to approach every work-related task with customer satisfaction being of utmost concern, regardless of job role or degree of direct customer contact. USAir News frequently stresses the impact on customers of work done by those far removed from day-to-day interaction with them.

Discussions of the "Putting People First" workshops identify specific interpersonal skills, such as direct eye contact, attentive listening, and addressing passengers by name when appropriate. Letters of commendation frequently cite friendliness, enthusiasm, efficiency, extraordinary interest and assistance in special situations, and an overall employee attitude of caring and concern. The letter writers usually state that, because of the attitudes and/or behavior of employees, USAir will be their airline of choice in the future. Letter writers critical of specific instances of rudeness or insensitivity often note that, if possible, they will probably avoid flying USAir in the future.

Many published commendations from fellow employees carry the message that the special things you do for our customers are noted and admired by your colleagues. One employee writes of being highly impressed by a crew member who used sign language to communicate flight information to hearing-impaired passengers. A flight attendant notes the pride she feels in working with individuals like the customer service agent who boarded a plane and took the time and effort to comfort a frightened, crying infant. Several employees, flying while off duty, commend the flight crews for making the experience so pleasant for everyone on board. Numerous other letters indicate

the same kind of pride felt in working for a Company that employs individuals such as those they are commending.

Through implication and overt statement and directive, USAir management has operationalized in detail its conception of customer service and has encouraged employee identification with this concept in the strongest possible manner. As 1990 drew to a close, customer feedback indicated that the focus on this area was beginning to pay significant dividends. However, there has been no decrease in communication emphasizing the importance of customer service. If anything, emphasis continues to increase. Transfers, layoffs, compensation reductions, and other unsettling cost-cutting actions pose a potentially serious threat to the reputation being earned for quality customer service. Seldom are financial exigency measures discussed that employees are not urged to avoid letting negative news divert attention from customer needs. The message is a simple one: Quality service will be the basis for competition in the airline industry in the 1990's. It will distinguish one carrier from another. Customer loyalty must be earned and earned again. If USAir does not provide superior customer service, there will be no USAir to provide any service.

Emphasized just as extensively as relationship with customers is the area of relations with co-workers. Many of the values, goals, and behaviors espoused in connection with customer service are also those advocated in employee interaction. As was true with customer relations, co-worker relations initiatives were prompted primarily by the merger-related culture-integration problems. The word "People" in the "Putting People First" workshops refers to

fellow employees, as well as USAir customers. Employees are urged to view each other as customers and to treat each other with the same respect, care, and concern.

Management has left few stones unturned in its efforts to encourage sharing of the philosophy: We are one Airline, and we must work together and function as such. Not surprisingly, throughout the course of the PSA and Piedmont mergers, USAir News content was replete with integration-related status reports, success stories, and promotional material. Features on many aspects of operations integration and personnel training appear regularly. Merger-based ad campaigns for USAir-PSA and USAir-Piedmont are highlighted. So, too, are inter-Company social activities and welcoming messages exchanged between employees of the three airlines. The "Taking Off Together" theme frequently appears in conjunction with the USAir-Piedmont merger. Many commendations are published praising both airlines and wishing the new partnership success. Much is made of the idea that the "new USAir" is fashioned from the best aspects of all three merger partners and that features of all three are incorporated in the new corporate image design.

Company officials frequently praise progress in merger procedures. Yet, even prior to the August 5, 1989, consummation of the Piedmont merger, remarks suggest awareness of possible problems and encourage unity. In June, 1988, Edwin I. Colodny warned against letting workforce integration problems tear the fabric of the Company apart. A year later Piedmont President, Tom Schick, reminded the USAir Management Club of the hard work required in

making the marriage succeed. Colodny warned the same group that there were "a few rocky months ahead." He admonishes, "Let's not lose sight of the fact that we are going to be one Company."

With financial concerns increasing by February of 1990, officials felt it necessary to urge employees openly ". . . to put aside their differences and make USAir the premier airline in the industry." They were urged ". . . to stop looking back and start looking forward." They were reminded that PSA, Piedmont, and the old USAir were gone and asked ". . . to create a new USAir with a new cultural spirit and reputation for excellence." Management's position was stated succinctly and unequivocally by President and CEO Seth E. Schofield in a July 7, 1991, presentation to the USAir Management Club:

> . . . I said this before and I will continue to say it until I feel that the problem has gone away, there is not an east and a west, there is not a north and a south, there is USAir as it is today. And the sooner we can get people to believe that, to sign on to it, . . . the better off we'll be. And we will continue to work on that.

Efforts aimed at promoting positive internal interpersonal relationships and Organization-wide unity have not been focused solely on the mergers. USAir News features on individuals and work units highlight and encourage sensitivity and a sense of family within and across departments and stations. In the past few years many stories have been aimed at increasing employee knowledge of work done in other departments and promoting interdepartmental cooperation. Interdepartmental learning and information-sharing workshops are

described and advocated. Arguably the word "teamwork" and the assertion of its necessity have been among the most frequently recurring features of USAir News content. The degree of success of interpersonal relationship and work-related teamwork initiatives is largely a matter of speculation. However, to the extent that operational performance achievements, employee feedback, and customer satisfaction can be used as barometers, much has been accomplished.

Symbols, such as wordmarks, trademarks, corporate logos, color schemes, and material artifacts, are not directly related to internal relationships. Neither can they be considered a form of common ground rhetorical appeal to employee identification (Cheney, 1983a). However, they can be a most effective means of promoting a sense of commonality and unity among employees across an organization (Cheney, 1983b).

When the "new USAir" corporate image was unveiled in May of 1989, it was designed, in part, to appeal to external publics and, in part, to foster that sense of internal unity and pride among employees. Almost every aspect of the Organization was included. A new color scheme was introduced to be applied to everything from aircraft interiors and exteriors to ground vehicles, from employee uniforms and accessories to airport counter and gate areas, and from office supplies to brochures and ticket jackets. A new USAir wordmark was introduced. The "new USAir" identity has been incorporated into the design scheme of USAir Express aircraft and materials.

A large and wide assortment of items bearing the "new USAir" identity is available in the Company giftshops. A giftshop representative has stressed the

point that wearing, carrying, using, and displaying these items makes employees walking billboards for the "new USAir." The red, white, and two shades of blue and their graphic designs are intended to embody and communicate the distinct and unique "new USAir."

Perhaps, there is no greater indication of employee identification with an organization than the expression of attitudes and values and the display of behaviors that represent or personify that company. USAir News features on employees consistently suggest this personification of USAir philosophy in remarks made by the workers themselves, and in observations about them made by colleagues and the authors of the stories. The notions of excellence in work habits and ethics and pride in USAir are almost always apparent in this material, as is the implicit suggestion that personification of this nature will be applauded by the Company.

Explicit appeals to Company personification by employees are numerous. Dress codes for them and their guests traveling as non-revenue passengers are frequently published. The rationale given for the codes is that the Company feels that employees and companions traveling on this basis are "representing USAir." When major cost-cutting measures were announced in January, 1991, USAir News published numerous questions that passengers (and most likely employees, as well) might ask regarding the status of the Airline. Suggested responses are provided under the heading: "What to Say When Passengers Ask about USAir's Economic Woes." The recommended responses feature liberal

use of the terms "we" and "our"; such a strategy both assumes and promotes personification.

In the spring of 1991 USAir introduced a corporate image advertising campaign designed to focus on, and fully reflect, the "new USAir." The theme of the campaign is "USAir Begins with You." The theme is aimed at promoting the notion of USAir's excellence in customer service to external publics. The message is set to music and worded as follows:

All across the USA,

As long as we've been around,

Our passengers are our neighbors,

This Country's our hometown.

And we know how hard you work.

We'll work that hard for you.

We believe in putting people first,

And that shows up in everything we do.

'Cause everywhere we go,

Every one of us knows,

Everything we do,

USAir Begins with You.

Every time we fly,

Every mile of sky,

Everything we do,

USAir Begins with You.

The musical lyrics and theme of the entire campaign are not designed for external audiences alone. They are clearly and admittedly designed to convey a message to employees, as well. Of course, strong reinforcement of the appeal to a customer service orientation is part of the message. Of great importance also is the encouragement of personification of the Company. With regard to work-related matters, "you, our employees, and the Company" are one. Not only does "USAir Begin with You, it is you, and you are USAir." For those employees who internalize this philosophy and make decisions and act accordingly, the employee-USAir bonding is complete.

Conclusion

The preceding pages have described the rhetorical efforts of USAir to encourage employee identification with, and by implication, commitment to, the Organization. The analysis was qualitative and exploratory. Observations in a study of this nature are tentative and should be tested empirically. No attempt was made to assess the success of USAir's rhetorical identification strategies. Nevertheless, in this regard, a recent occurrence does provide an interesting scenario for speculative thought. On October 5, 1992, the International Association of Machinists went on strike against USAir. The action was taken after lengthy negotiations had reached an impasse. At first glance, such an incident would certainly appear to suggest the lack of success of rhetorical identification strategies. However, a closer examination of this event reveals an interesting scenario. The strike was short-lived--a settlement announced within 72 hours after it began. During the intense negotiations sources close to the

talks reported that there were no personality or philosophical clashes between management and labor. No hatred or enmity was evident. The differences were strictly issue related. Furthermore, during the several days of picketing many strikers were observed wearing USAir caps, sweatshirts, T-shirts, and other items symbolically promoting the Airline. Perhaps the quick resolution indicated nothing about the success of USAir's rhetorical identification strategies. On the other hand, it does suggest a question: Could USAir's extensive encouragement of employee identification in recent years have had a positive impact on the resolution of the disagreement?

Based on the data examined in the preceding research, the rhetorical identification strategies that appear to be used most extensively by USAir are antithesis, the family metaphor, the transcendental "we," and numerous common ground tactics. Among these strategies, the common ground appeal is particularly emphasized. Identification with the Company is directly asserted and advocated. It must be remembered that identification with an organization does not mean that organization is necessarily the source of any individual's system of values and behaviors. It means simply that, to the extent that an employee and his/her organization share the same system, the employee identifies with that organization.

This report did not attempt to assess the merit or ethical nature of efforts to encourage employee identification. However, as was noted, such encouragement of identification and the other dimensions of commitment is commonplace across corporate America. Furthermore, identification with

targets, such as workplace organizations, is natural and usually highly functional for both the employees and their companies. Indeed, it would seem that the consequences of identifying with values, goals, and behaviors such as those advocated by USAir are likely to be far more positive than negative.

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